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Programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

Suspension of recruitment for posts in the General Service and related categories

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/276. In that resolution the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it comprehensively at the beginning of its sixtieth session on the issue of lifting the suspension of recruitment for posts in the General Service and related categories for the remainder of the biennium 2004-2005.

High vacancy rates for the General Service and related categories for the period have resulted in significant difficulties with programme implementation across the Secretariat. Staff turnover between offices and departments has been extremely high. Vacancies arising in areas that require specialized skills or experience have been extremely difficult to fill. Short-term measures have included increased reliance on individual contractors and overtime for existing staff. However, the vacancy experience has shown that those interim measures are not sustainable in the long term, and, accordingly, it is recommended that the suspension of recruitment be lifted.

* Submission of the report was delayed because of the need to obtain input from departments and offices.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 58/270, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to suspend recruitment action for new vacancies in General Service posts for the biennium 2004-2005, with the exception of safety and security personnel and editorial assistants (text processors) in language functions, and to report on the progress made and on the impact of those measures in the context of his performance reports. The Secretary-General indicated in the first performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 that, in view of the difficulties being experienced as a result of the suspension, a report would be submitted to the General Assembly in the latter part of 2005 recommending, as appropriate, the lifting of the suspension of recruitment for posts in the General Service and related categories for the remainder of the biennium. In section VIII, paragraph 7, of its resolution 59/276, the General Assembly noted the relevant paragraph of the first performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/59/578, para. 42) and requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly comprehensively on the issue at the beginning of its sixtieth session. Accordingly, the present report has been prepared pursuant to resolution 59/276.

II. Vacancy rate analysis

2. With the suspension of recruitment for posts in the General Service and related categories, the filling of vacant posts has occurred through the placement or promotion of existing staff members, generally with the effect of creating other vacancies. General Service posts have become vacant through the movement of staff to other offices, as well as through the scheduled retirement and separation of staff members. As a result, while the distribution of vacancies within and among programmes has fluctuated over the course of the biennium, there has been a clear increase in the overall vacancy rate for posts subject to the suspension.

3. Paragraphs 39 to 42 of the first performance report (A/59/578) detail the 2004 vacancy experience and include summary information related to the impact of the suspension of recruitment. At the end of the 2002-2003 biennium a total of 151 General Service regular budget posts were reported as vacant. By the end of December 2004, the number of General Service regular budget posts reported as vacant had increased to 210. Following General Assembly action in December 2004, some 361 General Service posts were added to the regular budget staffing table, primarily reflecting efforts to strengthen security and safety. By end January 2005, vacant General Service posts amounted to 416 regular budget posts. Given the exception to the suspension of recruitment regarding safety and security personnel, and as a result of efforts to expeditiously fill those security posts, the overall number of vacant General Service regular budget posts was reduced to 315 posts as at the end of July 2005. The end July 2005 vacancy information reflects a General Service vacancy rate of 5.7 per cent, a rate which is still substantially higher than the rates for 2004 and prior years.

4. The following chart reflects annual average vacancy rates realized in recent years for General Service and related categories. As reflected below, the 2005 experience reflects vacancies at an average rate approximately twice that normally experienced.

5. Taking into account rates budgeted for new and continuing posts, composite rates of 3.9 per cent and 5.8 per cent were budgeted for the General Service and related categories for 2004 and 2005, respectively. By comparison, the realized vacancy rates amount to 3.2 per cent for 2004 and to 6.5 per cent for the period January to July 2005. Therefore, while the 2004 experience was below budgeted rates, the 2005 experience to date has exceeded budgeted rates, resulting in a second year experience trending towards an offset of the first year shortfall.

6. A full listing of vacancy rates by section as of 31 July 2005 is reflected in the annex to the present document.

III. Assessment of the impact of suspension of recruitment

7. At the start of the biennium, the impact of suspension of recruitment was limited, largely owing to the completion of recruitment actions for already existing vacancies (i.e., those advertised in 2003). In addition, some success was initially reported in filling vacant posts on a timely basis through internal recruitment either within an office or from other offices at the same duty station. However, by the second quarter of 2004 several departments had indicated increasing difficulties arising as a result of the suspension.

8. Competition among departments for staff has been intense and staff turnover has been at high levels. Succession planning within the General Service and related categories has been virtually impossible, with no new entry level staff being recruited. Often, eligible candidates who apply for a vacant post in one office are selected by another office before the selection process is completed. In such cases, if no other candidate on the Galaxy staffing list satisfies the requirements for the position, the vacancy must be readvertised, resulting in a prolonged period of programme implementation without the required staffing levels. An increased burden has been placed on programme managers, who are forced to spend a disproportionate amount of time on the recruitment process. An inordinate amount of time has been devoted to dealing with vacancies, as well as to the training of new staff.

9. Vacancies in specialized areas have been extremely difficult to fill. For example, difficulty has been reported in engaging graphic designers, desktop publishers and audio-visual production assistants. In some instances, vacant positions required a combination of skills or languages, for which no suitable candidate could be found internally. Those positions were advertised, and often readvertised, and then the requirements lowered so as to accept the best candidates available internally. Given the shortage of qualified candidates, and the frequent need to advertise posts more than once, significant delays have been experienced in filling posts.

10. Difficulties have been reported in obtaining experienced candidates necessary to maintain staffing levels in a wide spectrum of areas, including the coordination of humanitarian assistance activities, operational support of human rights activities, and the organization and support of workshops and meetings necessary for programme implementation. Difficulties have also been reported in various areas throughout the administration, including facilities management, where delays have occurred in the processing of work orders and the provision of help-desk services.

11. One of the areas critically affected by the suspension of recruitment is the messenger sub-unit of the Mail Operations Unit in the Office of Central Support Services. The messenger sub-unit has a particularly high concentration of low-level General Service posts. During the biennium, staff within the sub-unit have been attracted by the availability of higher level General Service vacancies in other offices. As more and more junior level staff from this area have accepted positions in other offices, the result has been severe staff shortages and consequent reduction in deliveries. With approximately 30 per cent fewer staff, messenger runs have been reduced from three to two daily, and on occasions to one a day. Additionally, the sub-unit is no longer able to provide dedicated service to major conferences and, as is customary, to the various offices which require dedicated service during the General Assembly. The quality of service that is normally expected can no longer be maintained. With fewer staff available, overtime usage has increased; however, longer working hours have taken a toll on the morale, health and motivation of the staff, and there has been an increase in sick and emergency leave taken.

12. In dealing with the suspension, departments have utilized a number of interim measures. In some instances, the level of skills required has been lowered and the best available candidate accepted. There has been increased reliance on overtime and on individual contractors, normally for six-month periods. Professional staff have carried out their own functions and support functions simultaneously. The increased workload has negatively affected staff morale. Some offices have reprioritized where possible, focusing on the completion of operational work, while delaying the production of reports. In summary, while the use of individual contractors, and in some instances interns, may have alleviated problems in the short term, the suspension has led to production delays, and often to a failure to meet deadlines. These measures cannot be sustained.

13. As regards medium- to long-term issues, the General Service to Professional ratio continues to be subject to review. In paragraph 72 of resolution 56/253, the General Assembly noted with concern the high proportion of General Service posts compared to Professional posts in the regional commissions. In a number of cases, proactive steps have been taken to address this issue in the context of the review of staffing requirements in the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007 (see

table 18.27 of A/60/6 (Sect. 18)). As a result of the overall review of staffing requirements, the staffing table for 2006-2007 reflects a significant reconfiguration, resulting in the reduction of 92 General Service posts and the addition of 82 Professional posts.

14. In reporting on its review of the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions indicated that, while there may be some General Service functions that could be combined or posts that could be abolished as the result of advances in information technology and measures to reduce duplication and inefficient administrative processes, it is of the view that the suspension of General Service recruitment across the board may have been too broad a measure. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee recommended that the suspension of recruitment be lifted (see A/60/7, para. 83). The Committee also noted that the proposed vacancy rates for General Service for 2006-2007 anticipate the lifting of the suspension.

15. The Advisory Committee further recommended that a comprehensive analysis of the functions performed by the General Service staff be undertaken, with a view to more accurately determining which posts can be eliminated without detriment to the work of the Organization. A consultant has been engaged to review the issue of the proportion of General Service staff to Professional staff. It is expected that the results of that review will be reported in the context of the second performance report for the 2004-2005 biennium.

IV. Conclusions and recommendation

16. **Taking into account the vacancy advertisement and processing time required for recruitment, the lifting of the suspension of recruitment in the General Service and related categories in the last quarter of 2005 would not result in any additional costs for the biennium 2004-2005. As regards the biennium 2006-2007, the normal General Service vacancy rate (1.5 per cent) used in the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007 anticipates the lifting of the suspension in recruitment; hence, no additional financial implications would arise in the forthcoming biennium. Accordingly, it is recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to lift the suspension of recruitment in the General Service and related categories effective 1 December 2005.**

Annex

Vacancy statistics for authorized posts under the regular budget as at 31 July 2005

		Professional			*General Service*			*Total*		
	Section	*Authorized*	*Vacant*	*Rate*	*Authorized*	*Vacant*	*Rate*	*Authorized*	*Vacant*	*Rate*
1.	Overall policymaking, direction and coordination	70	6	8.6	79	4	5.1	149	10	6.7
2.	General Assembly affairs and conference services	950	52	5.5	964	50	5.2	1 914	102	5.3
3.	Political affairs	140	16	11.4	127	10	7.9	267	26	9.7
4.	Disarmament	35	4	11.4	20	1	5.0	55	5	9.1
5.	Peacekeeping operations	52	3	5.8	329	26	7.9	381	29	7.6
6.	Peaceful uses of outer space	15	1	6.7	5	0	0.0	20	1	5.0
7.	International Court of Justice	45	4	8.9	53	1	1.9	98	5	5.1
8.	Legal affairs	85	5	5.9	61	3	4.9	146	8	5.5
9.	Economic and social affairs	318	18	5.7	224	9	4.0	542	27	5.0
10.	Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States	10	1	10.0	4	1	25.0	14	2	14.3
11.	United Nations support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development	19	3	15.8	11	2	18.2	30	5	16.7
12.	Trade and development	228	7	3.1	167	8	4.8	395	15	3.8
14.	Environment	29	1	3.4	17	1	5.9	46	2	4.3
15.	Human settlements	48	6	12.5	25	0	0.0	73	6	8.2
16.	Crime prevention and criminal justice	26	0	0.0	9	0	0.0	35	0	0.0
17.	International drug control	47	0	0.0	23	0	0.0	70	0	0.0
18.	Economic and social development in Africa	221	16	7.2	305	0	0.0	526	16	3.0
19.	Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific	178	8	4.5	261	3	1.1	439	11	2.5
20.	Economic development in Europe	119	2	1.7	76	5	6.6	195	7	3.6
21.	Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean	192	10	5.2	287	23	8.0	479	33	6.9
22.	Economic and social development in Western Asia	106	5	4.7	150	6	4.0	256	11	4.3
24.	Human rights	120	12	10.0	57	2	3.5	177	14	7.9
25.	Protection of and assistance to refugees	2	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	2	0	0.0

	Section	Professional			General Service			Total		
		Authorized	*Vacant*	*Rate*	*Authorized*	*Vacant*	*Rate*	*Authorized*	*Vacant*	*Rate*
26.	Palestine refugees	99	7	7.1	11	1	9.1	110	8	7.3
27.	Humanitarian assistance	44	3	6.8	17	0	0.0	61	3	4.9
28.	Public information	280	14	5.0	468	13	2.8	748	27	3.6
29.	Management and central support services	372	14	3.8	918	36	3.9	1 290	50	3.9
30.	Internal oversight	61	4	6.6	30	2	6.7	91	6	6.6
36.	Safety and security	52	28	53.8	877	108	12.3	929	136	14.6
	Subtotal	**3 963**	**250**	**6.3**	**5 575**	**315**	**5.7**	**9 538**	**565**	**5.9**
	Income section 3 Services to the public	15	3	20.0	88	8	9.1	103	11	10.7
	Subtotal	**15**	**3**	**20.0**	**88**	**8**	**9.1**	**103**	**11**	**10.7**
	Total	**3 978**	**253**	**6.4**	**5 663**	**323**	**5.7**	**9 641**	**576**	**6.0**